

MANAGEMENT OF NOAA SMALL BOATS
Draft 9d, August 20, 2002

SECTION 1. PURPOSE.

.01 This Order establishes National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) policy for management and safe operation of boats less than 300 gross tons.

.02 This Order establishes minimum standards and required inspections to be followed by all NOAA programs operating boats.

.03 This Order establishes standards of visual identification and numbering for NOAA boats.

SECTION 2. BACKGROUND.

Operating boats in support of marine research involves unique associated risks. Many NOAA activities and facilities rely on boats to achieve mission requirements. There are numerous regulatory standards that address boat safety, but little guidance or few regulations tailored specifically to the special mission of research motorboats less than 65 feet or small research vessels less than 300 gross tons. Current marine standards are derived from international conventions, lessons learned from casualties, and advances in technology. As such, the body of regulatory information continues to grow and change. All vessels owned by NOAA are considered public vessels and are therefore exempt from regulatory oversight by the United States Coast Guard (USCG). However, it is NOAA's intent, as steward of the Nation's oceans and atmosphere, to comply with, or exceed, all applicable regulatory and industry standards and foster a management culture committed to safe and environmentally sound boat operations based upon the principles of risk management.

SECTION 3. DEFINITIONS.

.01 Alteration and Repair of Small Boats.

a. Alteration or Modification. A change to the configuration of a boat with regard to its navigation, communication, mission, ventilation, or piping systems. Examples of an alteration or modification include the addition of scientific transducers, RADAR sets, rearrangement of helm consoles, conversion of spaces (e.g., storage space to lab space), or installation of port lights.

b. Significant Alteration or Modification. A change to the configuration of a boat with regard to structural, mechanical, or electrical systems. Examples of significant alterations include the addition of structures or winches, the addition of any weight handling gear (e.g., A-frame, crane, articulated boom), replacement of inboard propulsion engines, installation of electric generators, lengthening of a vessel, or addition of a bow pulpit.

c. Repair. A restoration of a boat's configuration or capability that is necessary because of wear and/or failure of existing systems and equipment.

.02 Boat. As used in this Order refers to all craft less than 300 gross registered tons propelled by any means and commonly used to carry people on a body of water, but does not include sea planes.

.03 Gross Registered Tonnage (gross tons). As used in this Order, is a unit of measure referenced to determine applicable regulation for vessels. Measurement of gross tons is defined in Part 69.209(a) of Title 46 of the Code of Federal Regulations (46 CFR 69.209(a)) and for most monohull vessels will be determined by the formula: gross tonnage = ((overall length x overall breadth x overall depth) x 0.67)) /100.

.04 Overall Length. Or length overall (LOA) as used in this Order, and as defined in 46 CFR 69.203, means the horizontal distance between the outboard side of the foremost part of the stem and the outboard side of the aftermost part of the stern, excluding rudders, outboard motor brackets, and other similar fittings and attachments.

.05 Motorboat. As used in this Order, refers to all craft less than 300 gross registered tons propelled by machinery and commonly used to carry people on a body of water, but does not include sea planes.

.06 Motorboat Classifications. NOAA motorboat classifications are developed from USCG definitions for motorboats, and apply to all boats propelled by machinery, as follows:

- a. Class A - Less than 16 feet length overall;
- b. Class I - 16 feet but less than 26 feet length overall;
- c. Class II - 26 feet but less than 40 feet length overall;
- d. Class III - 40 feet but not more than 65 feet length overall; and
- e. Small Research Vessel (SRV) - greater than 65 feet length overall, but less than 300 gross tons and engaged in operations for greater than 12 hours.

.07 Operational Risk Management. A process involving an examination of hazards and associated controls to reduce risk to personnel, vessels, environment, mission, or any stakeholder in NOAA operations.

.08 Program Manager. A government or contract employee in charge of, and having oversight over, a specific mission, activity, or scientific investigation within a NOAA Line or Staff Office. Examples of Program Managers include Chiefs of Fishery Ecology, Chiefs of Habitat Restoration, or Chiefs of Ocean Chemistry.

.09 Qualified Motorboat. As used in this Order is used to describe Class II and smaller motorboats that are elaborate or complex in terms of engineering design or mission. A list of qualified motorboats and sample qualifying criteria are available at www.sbp.noaa.gov.

.10 Responsible Person. A Government or contract employee whose position description requires them to be involved in the routine oversight or operation of a boat or boats. Examples of Responsible Persons include marine superintendents, port captains, field operations managers, environmental compliance & safety staff, captains, boat operators, or boat maintenance staff.

.11 Senior Field Manager. A government employee in charge of and having responsibility for all boat operations conducted at a program or facility. Examples of Senior Field Managers include Laboratory Directors, Sanctuary Managers, Small Research Vessel Captains, or Field Party Chiefs.

.12 Surplus Transfer. A means of gaining ownership of boats with little or no cost to the receiving entity.

.13 Vessel. See boat.

.14 Vessel Operations Manual (VOM). A compilation of instructions, procedures, regulations, and guidelines derived from an operational risk assessment. The VOM is intended to promulgate specific individualized requirements and instructions for the safe and efficient management and operation of a Small Research Vessel, Class III motorboat, or qualified Class II motorboat.

.15 Vessel Policy (VP). A compilation of instructions, procedures, regulations, and guidelines derived from an operational risk assessment. A VP is intended to promulgate management and safety policy applicable to all boats at a NOAA program or facility.

SECTION 4. SCOPE AND RESPONSIBILITY.

.01 NOAA shall be responsible for providing resources to NOAA Line or Staff Offices to meet the requirements of this Order.

.02 NOAA programs or facilities that operate boats shall be responsible for:

a. the safe operation, inspection compliance, life cycle management, and maintenance of boats owned, operated or under their direct organizational control;

b. developing Program Vessel Policy and/or Vessel Operations Manuals for all boats owned, operated, or under the direct organizational control of their respective programs;

c. obtaining written guidance based on review by the NOAA Small Boat Program during the development, or prior to the promulgation of, Program Vessel Policy and/or Vessel Operations Manuals; and

d. assigning routine management and oversight of each boat owned, operated, or under their direct organizational control to a Responsible Person.

.03 The NOAA Small Boat Program shall be responsible for:

- a. serving as principal advisor or technical point of contact for operational, maintenance, procurement, acquisition, or regulatory standards set forth by this Order;
- b. implementing an inspection system based on applicable marine safety standards;
- c. managing a database containing an inventory of vessels and their attributes;
- d. providing guidance, or review and comment, to Senior Field Managers or Responsible Persons during the development, or prior to the promulgation of, operational risk management plans; and
- e. assisting Line Office activities on an as-needed basis, and to the extent that resources allow, with marine engineering, electronics, or regulatory interpretation support.

.04 The NOAA Small Boat Program, Line Offices, and Staff Offices are responsible for collaborating as partners with a common interest in safe, efficient, and environmentally sound small boat operations. This partnership shall foster a corporate culture that values the boat operator, encourages the distribution of information, seeks a quality approach, shares commitment, and seeks to manage operational risk.

SECTION 5. MOTORBOAT PURCHASE AND SURPLUS TRANSFER.

.01 Purchasing Motorboats.

- a. Senior Field Managers, or their designee(s), shall conduct a risk assessment to evaluate the suitability of a proposed motorboat, or design, in relation to operational requirements, safety, and environmental compliance prior to initiating a motorboat purchase.
- b. Senior Field Managers, or their designee(s), shall notify the NOAA Small Boat Program Coordinator when a proposed motorboat will require modification after delivery to meet mission requirements, or will be built to Government-furnished technical specifications.
- c. When a motorboat meets the criteria of Section 5.01b of this Order, Senior Field Managers, or their designee(s), shall ensure that contract specifications are written or reviewed by either an Office of Marine and Aviation Operations (OMAO) Small Boat Engineer, a professional marine engineer, or naval architect. The review shall examine the resultant craft to ensure that it will be properly configured with respect to safety systems, stability, mission capabilities, sound marine engineering practices, environmental compliance, and Appendix II of this Order, "NOAA Small Boat Visual Identification and Numbering."
- d. Senior Field Managers may exempt Class A, I, or II motorboats from the requirement to conduct a risk assessment prior to purchase, per Section 5.01a of this Order, when the risk factors for the motorboat to be procured are already addressed or known from previous experience with similar craft engaged in similar missions.

.02 Surplus Transfer. Prior to taking ownership of a surplus motorboat, Senior Field Managers,

or their designee(s), shall:

a. evaluate the potential safety and environmental implications of the motorboat as it relates to ownership, operation, and eventual disposal; and

b. arrange for a marine survey to supplement the evaluation required by this paragraph and notify the NOAA Small Boat Program Coordinator for the acquisition of all:

1. qualified Class II motorboats;

2. Class III motorboats; and

3. Small Research Vessels.

c. The marine survey shall determine the cost and extent of modifications or repairs needed to deliver the motorboat to a satisfactory operating condition for the intended mission.

SECTION 6. ALTERATION AND REPAIR OF MOTORBOATS.

.01 Review. All alterations to NOAA motorboats shall be reviewed by the Program Manager or Responsible Person to assess their potential impact on safety, watertight integrity, and stability. Line Office personnel shall seek advice or guidance from an OMAO Small Boat Engineer if there is doubt with respect to potential impacts.

.02 Standards. Alterations and repairs shall be performed in accordance with applicable marine engineering standards, rules, instructions, or regulations. A listing of current and potentially applicable standards, rules, instructions, and regulations is provided on the Small Boat Program web site.

.03 Significant Alterations. For all significant alterations, Senior Field Managers or Responsible Persons shall seek marine engineering services through OMAO or a professional marine engineer.

.04 Engineering Records. Records, such as drawings or weight and moment reports, resulting from the alteration of motorboats shall be maintained at the appropriate Line Office program or facility office.

SECTION 7. OPERATION OF BOATS.

.01 Operational Risk Assessment. Every NOAA activity that operates boats shall conduct an operational risk assessment. The assessment shall be based on an evaluation of operational risks to personnel, vessel, environment, mission, and public relations.

a. Vessel Operations Manual. Senior Field Managers, in consultation with their field personnel, shall develop a Vessel Operations Manual (VOM) for each SRV, Class III motorboat, and qualified Class II motorboat under their direct organizational control. The VOM shall address

the findings of the operational risk assessment described in Section 7.01 of this Order as well as procedures specific to the operation of the boat.

b. Program Vessel Policy. Senior Field Managers, in consultation with their field personnel, shall develop a comprehensive Program Vessel Policy. In addition to addressing the minimum requirements of this Order, the Program Vessel Policy shall be tailored to address specific regional risks and issues common to all boats under the direct organizational control of a field activity, or group of related field activities as described in Section 7.01 of this Order.

c. Assistance. Additional information and guidance relating to operational risk assessment and the development of operational risk management plans are available on line at the Small Boat Program web site.

.02 Float Plans.

a. All use of NOAA motorboats shall be documented by a float plan filed prior to departure which lists, as a minimum:

1. the vessel name;
2. date and time of departure;
3. intended destination or working area;
4. estimated date and time of return or arrival;
5. names of persons on board; and,
6. type of operation (e.g., scuba diving, coring, observation, patrol)

b. The boat operator shall tender the plan, prior to departure, to a person on shore as follows:

1. for voyages of less than twelve (12) hours, the plan may be given verbally; or
2. for voyages of greater than twelve (12) hours duration, the plan must be written and shall establish a tracking and communications procedure that requires the boat to report its position and operations at least daily.
3. The person on shore shall be responsible for determining whether a vessel is overdue for arrival and shall be able to take appropriate action to either determine the location of the vessel or initiate emergency response.

.03 Emergency Contacts. Senior Field Managers, Program Managers, or their designee shall ensure that the name and contact number of a family member, significant other, or legal guardian is available for all persons embarked aboard a boat while the boat is being operated.

.04 Testing of Safety Equipment. Operational boats equipped with electronic safety equipment shall conduct operational tests of the equipment as directed by regulation. If no regulation exists, testing shall be done in accordance with manufacturer instructions or monthly at a minimum. In addition, EPIRB beacon identification registration information shall be reviewed at least annually to ensure that it contains valid emergency contact information.

.05 Transportation of Passengers. When permitted by Program Vessel Policy or a Vessel Operations Manual, and prearranged and approved by the Senior Field Manager, or his/her designee, non-mission critical personnel may be transported on NOAA boats as passengers. Non-mission critical may include members of the media, guests, VIPs, or service organizations. Approvals will be granted when:

- a. it is found to be clearly in the interest of the Government;
- b. the boat is being used for official purposes; and,
- c. the passengers will not interfere with NOAA operations.

The boat operator may authorize passage in emergencies involving the protection of life. For further guidance consult NAO 217-106 "Transportation of Nongovernment Personnel as Passengers on NOAA Vessels, Aircraft, and Motor Vehicles."

.06 Good Marine Practice.

- a. All NOAA boats shall be operated in a safe and courteous manner.
- b. All NOAA boats shall be maintained in a seaworthy condition.
- c. Marine weather forecasts shall be evaluated with respect to the operations area, vessel limitations, and mission requirements prior to engaging in any small boat operation.

.07 Operator Training and Certification. All operators of NOAA boats shall be appropriately trained and certified based on boat size, engineering complexity, and nature of operations. The following **minimum** training requirements apply:

a. NOAA Class III Motorboats and Small Research Vessels.

- 1. Commissioned or Warrant Officers of the Uniformed Services who have qualified as Officer of the Deck (Underway) and who have exercised this qualification during the past five (5) years may be considered as having qualifications equivalent to the USCG licensed operators.
- 2. Other than officers mentioned in Section 7.09a.1. of this Order, all designated operators must possess a valid USCG license appropriate to the intended service of the vessel.

b. NOAA Class A, I, or II Motorboats. Operators of NOAA Class A, I, or II motorboats shall obtain qualification by participation in either:

1. USCG Auxiliary basic boat operators course;
 2. U.S. Power Squadron (USPS) basic boat operators course;
 3. U.S. Department of the Treasury Marine Law Enforcement Training Program; or,
 4. equivalent USCG or NOAA approved boat operator training course.
- c. CPR and First Aid Training. All boat operators shall have current Red Cross or equivalent certification in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and First Aid.
- d. Assistance. Additional information pertaining to operator training is available on line at the Small Boat Program web site.

.08 Accident Reporting and Investigation.

- a. NOAA activities shall follow all existing policy regarding the reporting of accidents.
- b. Senior Field Managers, or their designee, shall notify the NOAA Small Boat Program Coordinator of a motorboat accident or incident when it involves:
 1. unintentional grounding for greater than 24 hours;
 2. explosions;
 3. sinking;
 4. fire;
 5. collisions involving breach of hull integrity;
 6. any incident which results in damage in excess of \$10,000 by or to the motorboat, its systems or its equipment;
 7. incapacitating injury requiring professional medical attention, hospitalization for greater than 72 hours, or loss of life of any person;
 8. unintentional and extensive flooding (self bailing boats excluded);
 9. discharge of oil or any substance capable of producing a sheen upon the water; or
 10. failure of gear and equipment and any other damage that may affect or impair a vessel's seaworthiness.
- c. When an accident meets the above criteria and the cause of such an accident is not clearly evident, the Senior Field Manager shall convene an investigation. Findings and

recommendations from the investigation shall be made available to the Senior Field Manager, Program Manager, OMAO, NOAA Small Boat Program Coordinator, and OMAO Small Boat Engineer.

d. Findings and lessons learned from an accident investigation shall be distributed by the NOAA Small Boat Program to the NOAA small boat user community. The identity of the vessel, personnel, and program or facility will remain anonymous.

SECTION 8. INSPECTION OF BOATS.

.01 Purpose. Inspection of NOAA boats is conducted to promote safe operations through identification of deficiencies in complying with applicable regulation, maintaining material condition, prudent seamanship, and good marine practice. See Appendix I - "NOAA Boat Inspection" for detailed inspection program guidance and procedures.

.02 Inspection Criteria.

a. General. Inspection criteria will be determined by OMAO, with program or facility involvement. Inspection criteria will be adapted from the most relevant regulations pertaining to boats of similar employment.

b. Safety, Fire Fighting, and Life Saving. The minimum safety, fire fighting, and life saving equipment requirements for boats are derived from USCG regulations for recreational vessels and are located in Table 1.0 to Appendix I of this Order.

c. Communications and Navigation. The minimum communication and navigation equipment requirements for boats are based on the distance from shore that the boat will operate and are located in Table 2.0 to Appendix I of this Order.

SECTION 9. SMALL BOAT IDENTIFICATION AND NUMBERING.

.01 General. A uniform identification scheme is necessary to develop and promote public recognition of NOAA small boat activities in the coastal environment. A uniform numbering scheme is required by United States Code.

.02 Requirements. Visual identification and numbering requirements are provided in Appendix II to this Order.

SECTION 10. SMALL BOAT PROGRAM WEBSITE.

.01 General. A Small Boat Program web site shall be maintained to:

- a. promote the exchange of operational best practices and methods;
- b. serve as a pool of corporate knowledge;

- c. provide resources relating to training, engineering and operational support;
- d. provide resources and guidance related to operational risk assessment, VOMs, and VPs; and
- e. facilitate the practical implementation of this Order.

.02 URL. The small boat program site is located at www.sbp.noaa.gov.

SECTION 11. RECORDS MANAGEMENT.

.01 Inspection Reports. Maintained by OMAO.

.02 Vessel Operation Manuals and Program Vessel Policy. Maintained by the NOAA field activity. Copies shall be provided to the NOAA Small Boat Program Coordinator.

.03 Risk Assessment Records. Records generated during risk assessments shall be maintained at the NOAA field activity.

.04 Alteration Records. Engineering documents or drawings resulting from alterations to motorboats shall be maintained at the NOAA field activity.

.05 Operator Training Records. Operator training and certification records shall be maintained at the NOAA field activity.

.06 Boat Inventory. Boat inventories and hull registry numbers shall be maintained by OMAO.

SECTION 12. EFFECT ON OTHER ISSUANCES.

This Order supersedes NOAA Administrative Order (NAO) 217-103 dated June 20, 1991.

Chief Financial Officer/Chief
Administrative Officer

Attachments:

Appendix I - NOAA Motorboat Inspection

Appendix II - NOAA Small Boat Visual Identification and Numbering